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ABSTRACT

A three-year project is being conducted at Richmond Adult and Community College in England to develop and implement a modular learning plan. The aims of the project are to monitor the development of a modular learning program; to identify the advantages and disadvantages of a modular program for adult learners; to develop a revised modular program; and to offer guidance to other providers in the design and functions of a modular learning program. After the first year of the program, modules were defined, and timing and levels were worked out. Initial guidance is provided by guidance staff, with students then having regular sessions with tutors. The curriculum in the first year included English, mathematics, art, food, office skills, humanities, social sciences, English as a second language, design, nutrition, and business studies, with various courses on three levels. Enrollment varied from five in the preparatory level to 410 in level three. Staff support and training was provided both formally and informally. Assessment was encouraged. The modules were validated, and a process for allowing students to select from a wide range of modules to obtain certificates and diplomas was developed. Evaluation is ongoing, and results to date have been generally positive. (KC)

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BULLETIN NUMBER 2

MODULARISATION

in Adult Education and Training

APRIL 1989

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This bulletin reports on a three-year FEU project (RP489) based at Richmond Adult and Community College where a modular learning scheme (Study Plan) is being developed. The aims of the project are:

- *to monitor the development of a modular learning programme;*
- *to identify the advantages and disadvantages of a modular programme for adult learners;*
- *to develop a revised modular programme;*
- *to offer guidance to other providers in the design and functions of a modular learning programme.*

These aims were applied to the Study Plan scheme which was already in its first year of operation when the project began in February 1988.

BACKGROUND AND AIMS

Adult education has traditionally provided courses without accreditation, tailormade for student interests, and examination courses where syllabuses developed for use in quite different contexts have been followed. Study Plan aims to provide assessment and accreditation for such courses, and assess the work which forms an integral part of these.

The concept of Study Plan was developed in Richmond Adult and Community College in 1987. The aim was defined as the development of an integrated learning scheme for adults, offering 'a range of modules or credits building towards a college certificate (three credits) and/or college diploma (six credits)'. Students could study for personal development or vocational reasons. Exit routes to higher education, training and work would be carefully considered and developed. Well-developed Access courses

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(diploma level) formed a curriculum base at the time and much of the early development of the scheme arose out of the need to marry and develop programmes which had been separate.

Another aim of the scheme was to offer modules at four levels, with the existing 'Access' level (level III) the most advanced. There was an awareness in the college that Access courses tended to recruit students who, although they lacked formal qualifications, had achieved skills and levels of education which prepared them for entry to a fast-stream course. The college wanted to provide courses informed by 'Access' concepts and methods, from the basic education level through the range of college provision, and so not only broaden the base of Access recruitment but also prepare students for other vocational outlets.

The timing of this development was propitious. Access provision had developed nationally to the point of being established and familiar; the success of Access students in higher education was being documented; and GCSE had revolutionised mainstream examining. At the same time, there was a growing awareness of the need to rationalise qualifications and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) was developing a framework for this. Study Plan aims to develop a system of accreditation which can be used across the curriculum.

STRUCTURE

Defining a module

The module is the basic unit of the scheme and had to be defined in terms of tuition and counselling hours, and assessment requirements. Once this basic definition had been made, it was possible to develop variants such as mixed-mode or open-learning modules.

Factors which need to be taken into account in defining a module include:

- existing patterns of student attendance;
- cost of modules to students (many may wish to complete six modules in a year);
- assessment timing and procedures.

It was decided to fit modules into the existing year pattern and make it possible to run any module in any term. This meant a module could not exceed eleven weeks' duration. In defining the module, differences in departmental needs and practices became apparent and had to be weighed against the desirability of a standard unit length and cost. Teaching periods in programmes to be modularised varied between two and two-and-a-half hours, depending on whether practical activity was involved. Ultimately, the following compromise was reached:

1 module = 22-25 hrs tuition + 20 mins counselling time/student

For example: 10 x 2.5 hrs
11 x 2 hrs
6 x 4 hrs

This size fits conveniently into existing adult student patterns of attendance, and the slightly longer autumn term allows two weeks for extra counselling and guidance when it is most needed. In deciding on the most appropriate module size for an institution, the assessment pattern has also to be taken into consideration. Some tutors felt that assessment after 10 weeks' study was premature.

The levels

The four levels were designed to make it possible for a student to progress within Study Plan, from the upper level courses within adult basic education to access to higher education. Students can enter the scheme at whatever level is most appropriate for them. The provision of credits at all levels ensures that, whenever they leave the scheme, their attainments are documented. The outcomes when seeking work or access to further education or training will be monitored.

The four levels fit fairly well into the existing range of provision — basic education, mainstream beginners and return to learning, GCSE and Access level. In practice, the definitions of levels and appropriate recruitment can be problematic. However there is a similarity to NCVQ levels I, II and III.

Progression between the levels follows no set pattern; most students need to complete more than one credit at a level before progressing to a higher one. Study Plan modules can be combined with extension studies from any part of the curriculum; individual guidance is available.

Preparatory level

Modules at this level are appropriate for students in basic education who are nearly ready to progress to mainstream courses, or others who are unsure of their basic literacy or

numeracy skills. The modules are designed to respond flexibly to individual needs and help develop familiarity with learning skills.

Level I

Modules at this level assume basic literacy skills but no previous experience of the subject. They are task-orientated and cover basic elements of the subject. Their aim is to teach new skills, build confidence and arouse interest and awareness of new possibilities.

Level 2 : Certificate

Modules at this level aim to bring students to a level of understanding and competence broadly comparable to GCSE ('O' level). They develop a disciplined approach to study, concentrating on key skills and providing a frame of reference for the subject. A certificate is awarded for three or more credits.

Level 3 : Diploma

Modules at this level aim to develop an informed understanding of the discipline, its key concepts and some of the main approaches to it. Independent study forms an essential part of work and programmes prepare for access to higher education or supervisory and junior management roles. A diploma is awarded for six credits.

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

Initial guidance is provided by staff of the college Learning Information Service for Adults (LISA), who also interview, provide syllabuses, and refer enquirers to programme co-ordinators for further guidance.

Once embarked on Study Plan, students have regular counselling, including individual interviews with the tutor on each module. Tutors are allocated 20 minutes per student, but this is used flexibly. As they continue in the scheme, students have the opportunity to arrange sessions with their programme co-ordinator for more broadly based counselling. The demands on counselling time are likely to increase as the scheme develops.

In an accredited scheme where there are different levels of study, the question of failure has to be addressed. If pre-enrolment counselling is thorough enough, students should fail to attain credits only if they do not complete assignments. We have, however, had one student who was not suited to the programme she was enrolled on, and two others who were awarded credits at a lower level.

Being failed by an external examination board is very different from not achieving the required standard on a course where the tutor is also an assessor. The counselling of students who find themselves in this situation is a skill for which staff have requested training.

THE CURRICULUM

In the first full year of the project the modules offered were:

- *Preparatory level:* English and Maths
- *Level I:* Art, Core Skills (English, Maths, Speaking Out), Craft Studies, Food, Office Skills
- *Level II:* Art, Food and Health, Gateway (an integrated Humanities and Social Studies programme)
- *Level III:* ESL and integrated programmes: Art and Design, 'A' level English, Nutrition and Health Counselling, Business Studies, Society and the Arts, Fresh Start (Humanities and Social Studies)

STUDENT RESPONSE

Enrolment was generally high in the autumn term (1988):

Preparatory level	5 (Maths) + 21 later in term
Level I	291
Level II	60
Level III	410

It is clear that the largest demand is at Level III where programmes have clear vocational outcomes, are offered in packages and, in some cases, were already established.

Preparatory Level

Initially there were only five enrolments for Maths. However, Preparatory Level is embedded in Basic Education and, in the course of the term, a further 21 students opted to register and work for credits. They are within three 'Moving On' groups — two in Literacy and one in ESL.

Level I

Level I recruited a large number of students attracted by module content, duration and cost rather than accreditation. Those who did want accreditation were scattered across the curriculum. The exception to this was Office Skills in which there was a vocational outcome.

Level II

Programmes offered at Level II were small and new. The only one to recruit a majority of students wanting accreditation was Gateway, a Humanities and Social Science package of six modules. This may have been

because it was ready-made and seen as a lead into Fresh Start, the Level III course in Humanities and Social Sciences.

Level III

At Level III the vast majority of students wanted accreditation. The only exception to this was the Society and the Arts programme, a high-level liberal studies course with considerable continuity of clientele.

CURRICULUM ISSUES FOR REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT

- **Appropriate range of provision at each level;**
- **ensuring adequate progression routes through the levels;**
- **radical examination of level I (development of packages rather than isolated modules);**
- **careful development of office skills in the light of the high demand for accreditation in these subjects and the speed of progression through intensive modules;**
- **development of Level II, particularly with a view to preparation for work;**
- **rate of growth at Level III (there are a number of potential areas for new programmes);**
- **development of Open Learning delivery of modules.**

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Study Plan was an interdepartmental scheme from the outset, with a clear aim of involving each department and at all levels. Almost all full-time staff and many part-timers have been involved to varying degrees.

The impact of the restructuring that modularisation requires, and the introduction of assessment, moderation and validation into areas in which there has previously been no formal assessment, have called for a great deal of effort, goodwill, flexibility and courage from staff. There is a direct relationship between staff and student attitudes to assessment. Where staff feel that assessment is intrusive or threatening, they are unlikely to be able to present it in a positive and encouraging way to students. It is also much easier to develop modes of structuring and assessing work on new courses than it is to graft them on to existing provision. Developing new programmes with staff offers scope and generates excitement whereas altering provision which has been carefully developed and shown to work can cause resentment.

Staff support and training has been provided both formally and informally. The major concerns of staff were identified as:

- *Target groups*: Was there a demand for assessment across the curriculum? Did not Study Plan presuppose a different clientele?
- *Student reaction*: Would assessment frighten away potential students?
- *Assessment*: Could this be effectively done on 10-11 week modules? Training was needed to help teachers break down tasks.
- *Optional study plan*: Could assessed and non-assessed students work together or would this create resentments?
- *Pre-course and ongoing counselling*: How was this to be provided?
- *Part-time staff*: Would having to write assessments alienate them?
- *Philosophical*: The liberal idea of education as broadening the mind and increasing confidence could be lost by standardization and assessment.
- *Accreditation*: It was important to provide this, but would it distort course content?
- *Validation*: Without nationally recognised validation, certificates and diplomas would be of little worth.
- *Administration*: There should be a Study Plan office to centralize enrolment and records, deal with enquiries, and provide vital support for teachers and good communication with the public.

These questions and concerns continue to be relevant.

Training has been offered regularly and has dealt with assessment, counselling, marking comparability and general briefing matters. A set of tutor notes was also provided. However, the most successful training has been the work done in pairs and teams to define the skills, knowledge and understanding to be developed on each module. Continuing training requests are for more help with counselling, writing comments on credits, and the opportunity to look at comparable schemes.

Every teacher must be linked to a programme co-ordinator who can give individual support as required. As the project has developed and grown in different departments and at four levels, the need for a co-ordinator for each main section of the curriculum has become clear and the allocation of time for this has had to be addressed. It is the aim of the project to embed Study Plan within college departments as part of normal work. The following outline of the role has been developed.

The section co-ordinator

The role of the section co-ordinator is to work with the

project co-ordinator in the development and support of packages of modules. This includes:

- initial development — establishing curricula, levels and skills criteria;
- presentation of modules for validation;
- team leadership and tutor briefing and support, including convening and chairing meetings;
- guidance and counselling of students, and supporting tutors in this role;
- contacts with other educational institutions and industry (Sustained contact is necessary to establish and maintain Access routes and develop vocational outcomes.);
- promotion and publicity — including preparation of leaflets;
- oversight of credits — checking that they have been produced in reasonable time, appropriately completed, and keeping records;
- ensuring that coursework is available for moderation when required;
- working with the project worker to develop and evaluate Study Plan and provide the training needed for staff.

At the outset of the project the aim was to involve all full-time staff and to train and support existing part-time staff to implement Study Plan where it was being grafted onto existing provision. However, it was found to be inappropriate to some courses, and withdrawn from a few because of lack of demand. Some staff have been unhappy with Study Plan for either practical or philosophical reasons. As we plan the second year of the project, we have a clear policy of only involving those who feel really committed.

In Autumn 1988, staff were issued with a questionnaire which allowed them to express their views on all the key issues of the project. About two thirds of those who responded felt that the Study Plan system of assessment and accreditation was helpful and all found the associated counselling time helpful. The chief criticism was that Study Plan had been introduced on some modules where it was inappropriate and there was no demand for it. Targeting is still very much an issue. A follow-up questionnaire will be issued in the summer term.

ASSESSMENT

The aim is that assessment should be positive. A credit statement has been designed to provide a record of the attainment of skills, knowledge, understanding and ability in application. The front gives a summary of the module and a list of the key skills developed, with a tick-box assessment of the student's understanding and application of these. The back allows space for fuller comment by the tutor on the assignments and other aspects of the student's learning and contribution, and for the student's self-assessment. Negotiation of assessment is encouraged but not required. To implement this consistently would involve doubling the amount of counselling time and giving students individual interviews after their modules have ended. The time and cost constraints in part-time adult education mean that this is not generally possible.

Credits were first used in 1987/88. At the time grades were given at Levels 2 and 3, but staff found these unhelpful and inappropriate for adult students. The validating board and the local higher education representatives on the project steering committee were unanimous in finding the tick-box assessment of skills preferable to grades.

In the summer term of 1988, a questionnaire was used with Fresh Start students who had been issued with credits. Forty-eight (69%) responded, of whom 92% thought that the credit 'provided an adequate description of what they had achieved on the module'. The rest were critical of individual credits rather than their nature and scope. Generally they were very well received and their form remains unchanged apart from the absence of grades.

VALIDATION AND RECOGNITION

It was felt, from the outset, that if the college was to offer credits which led to certificates and diplomas, there had to be an external validating body to help establish and maintain standards and give credibility to the scheme. The college already had well-established Access links with various departments in the local higher education institutes and it would have been possible to attain validation for various programmes in conjunction with them. However, one of the central aims of Study Plan was to provide a unified scheme with a standard system of assessment which could operate across the curriculum, and for this reason it was decided that one of the national GCE examining boards should be approached. In July 1988 the Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations agreed to validate the scheme. The delegacy would accept modules for consideration, presented in an agreed format, and undertake inspection and moderation. In the summer of 1988 the first submission modules in Art and Design, Humanities and Social Studies, and Business Studies were validated and samples of students' work in the three areas were moderated.

Module validation

Documentation required for module validation:

- the syllabus, including information about teaching methods;
- the draft credit statement, including assessment criteria;
- exemplary assignments and further information as appropriate, for example, on resources.

Once modules have been validated they may be updated without revalidation, provided the assessment criteria and assignment rationale remain the same. This updating could involve, for example, changes in syllabus content or mode of delivery. Moderators would comment on the effect of such adaptations in their reports.

Certificates and diplomas

One of the advantages of a modular scheme is that it allows students to select from a wide range of modules. It is one of the aims of the scheme to retain this while ensuring that certificates and diplomas reflect progression rather than just record the accumulation of individual modules. In practice so far, students have opted for clearly linked packages rather than putting forward their own combinations, but this pattern may well change as the scheme becomes established. A framework of possibilities has therefore been developed.

Certificate level

At Level II only three credits are required for a certificate, with some shared assessment criteria between all three.

Diploma level

It is possible for students to negotiate multidisciplinary diplomas. A joint diploma with three credits in each of two main areas is a possibility, or there may be four clearly linked modules with two other modules from any part of the curriculum, e.g. four modules in Humanities and Social Sciences, all of which share some skills criteria, with one in Maths and one in Computer Graphics.

Prior learning accreditation

Generally, prior learning is taken into account at the level at which a student enters the scheme. However, there are some set packages of modules at diploma level where a student may be exempted from a module in a subject in which she/he has an appropriate qualification or work experience, and given a credit recording this.

Recognition

The scheme has been given active support by the local higher education institutions represented on the steering committee, and two have formally agreed that the diploma meets their general entrance requirements. As the project develops, the response to the diplomas and certificates, from both further and higher education institutions, will be monitored. In addition, contacts will be made with employers to learn about their requirements and gain their recognition of Study Plan qualifications.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

Evaluation is ongoing and preliminary findings have been incorporated in this bulletin. Studies are being made to test the appropriateness and effectiveness of Study Plan provision. Data on this is being collected from student records and student and staff questionnaires.

The evaluation will include:

- student profile by age, sex and fee category;
- student satisfaction with various packages and modules;
- attainment of credits, certificates and diplomas;
- progression within the scheme and to FE/HE and employment;
- staff attitudes;
- the impact of the scheme on the institution;
- attitudes of the wider community.

There will be a further report in spring 1990 and a final one in 1991.

Details of the availability of further copies of this bulletin and other FEU publications are available from the Information Centre, FEU, 2 Orange Street, London WC2H 7WE (Tel: 01-321 0433 ext. 256).

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